

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9566

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMCONSUL CASABLANCA

AMEMBASSY MADRID

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 4564

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, MO

SUBJECT: TRIALS OF POLITICAL PRISONERS AND POSSIBLE AMNESTY

1. BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY: THE BACKDROP FOR COUNTRY-WIDE POLITICAL TRIALS RECENTLY COMPLETED EXTENDS BACK TO THE TENSE ATMOSPHERE OF THE EARLY 70S. COUP ATTEMPTS IN 1971 AND 1972 WERE FOLLOWED BY STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS IN LATE 1972, AN ALLEGED LIBYAN-SPONSORED ARMED "INVASION" ATTEMPT BY MOROCCAN DISSIDENTS IN 1973 AND OTHER EPISODES OF ALLEGED ANTI-REGIME ACTIVITY THROUGHOUT 1973 AND 1974. THOUSANDS WERE INCARCERATED IN THIS PERIOD AND MANY HELD FOR INDEFINITE PERIODS WITHOUT TRIAL. TRIALS DID TAKE PLACE THROUGH 1973 AND 1974, AS DID SPORADIC RELEASES OF UNTRIED PRISONERS, BUT THE RECENT TRIALS WERE THE FIRST IN OVER TWO YEARS. THEY ALL DEALT WITH CHARGES STEMMING FROM THE 1973 AND 1974 EVENTS, INCLUDING
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THE 1973 "INVASION" ATTEMPT, WHICH NOT SURPRISINGLY CAME

TO BE DESCRIBED AS ALGERIAN AS WELL AS LIBYAN-INSPIRED IN THE PROSECUTION'S CHARGES. THE ALGERIAN CONNECTION WAS STATED AT THE OUTSET OF THE TRIAL, BUT WAS NOT STRESSED IN THE LATER PRESS ACCOUNTS, PRESUMABLY NOT TO IMPUGN THE LOYALTY OF THE DEFENDENTS IN THE CONTEXT OF PRESENT AREA TENSION.

2. AT THE CLIMAX OF A SIX-WEEK-LONG SERIES OF POLITICAL TRIALS, 209 PERSONS HAVE BEEN ACQUITTED, 70 CONVICTED. MOST SENTENCES WERE RELATIVELY LIGHT, AND WITH TIME ALREADY SERVED COUNTED, THE BULK OF THE GUILTY PERSONS SHOULD SOON BE RELEASED. NEARLY ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS STILL BEING HELD WITHOUT TRIAL APPEAR TO HAVE GONE BEFORE THE COURT AS A RESULT OF THESE STEPS. AN ESTIMATED 180 REMAIN.

3. SINCE THE GREAT MAJORITY OF THE INDIVIDUALS ON TRIAL WERE CLOSELY ASSOCIATED WITH USFP, ONE OF THE DEMANDS OF THAT PARTY FOR ITS ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION--TRIAL OR RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS--PRESUMABLY WILL HAVE BEEN SATISFACTORILY MET BY THE GOVERNMENT. OTHER PARTIES, ESPECIALLY ISTIQLAL AND PPS (COMMUNIST), HAD ECHOED THE USFP'S POSITION BUT WITH LESS EMPHASIS. RUMORS OF A GENERAL AMNESTY TO BE ANNOUNCED SOON PERSIST, ANOTHER STEP LIKELY TO PLEASE THE POLITICAL PARTIES. A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS AWAIT RESOLUTION, HOWEVER, BEFORE ELECTIONS THIS FALL CAN BE CONSIDERED A FOREGONE CONCLUSION. THESE MOVES INDICATE IN OUR JUDGMENT, A RENEWED SENSE OF CONFIDENCE ON THE PART OF THE KING REGARDING HIS INTERNAL POSITION. END SUMMARY

4. RECENT TRIAL RESULTS: FIGURES FOLLOW ON THOSE CHARGED IN THE 1973 CIVIL "UPRISING": FES--10 ACQUITTTED, 37 CONVICTED (SENTENCES WERE HEAVIEST THERE, RANGING FROM 1-30 YEARS); SETTAT--5 ACQUITTED, 16 CONVICTED (1-5 YEARS); MEKNEW--87 ACQUITTED, 34 CONVICTED (1-4 YEARS); RABAT--60 ACQUITTED, 12 CONVICTED (1 YEAR-LIFE IMPRISONMENT). IN ADDITION, THE RESULTS OF THE RABAT MILITARY TRIBUNAL WERE 6 ACQUITTED AND 1 CONVICTED AND SENTENCED TO DEATH. THE LATTER CASE DEALT WITH THE KILLING OF ONE POLICEMAN AND SEVERE WOUNDING OF ANOTHER IN OUJDA IN 1973--HENCE THE MILITARY TRIBUNAL. ALL 7 HAD ORIGINALLY BEEN SENTENCED TO DEATH IN ABSENTIA.

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5. TWO OTHER POLITICAL TRIALS DEALING WITH EVENTS OF 1973 WERE ALSO RECENTLY COMPLETED. IN CASABLANCA, 6 CONVICTED INDIVIDUALS INCLUDING 3 STUDENTS RECEIVED 3 MONTHS IMPRISONMENT ON AUGUST 14. ANOTHER 20 WERE ACQUITTED. THESE PERSONS HAD BEEN CHARGED WITH FORMING AN ILLEGAL SECONDARY STUDENTS' ORGANIZATION AND FOR RESPONSIBILITY FOR POLITICALLY MOTIVATED ACTS OF VANDALISM OCCURRING IN CASABLANCA IN 1973. ON AUGUST 9, IN CASABLANCA, 6 UNIVERSITY STUDENTS INCLUDING THE FORMER HEAD OF THE NOW-BANNED UNEM (UNION

NATIONAL DES ETUDIANTS MAROCAINS) ABDELAZIZ MENHEBI, WERE PUT ON TRIAL FOR ILLEGAL DISTRIBUTION OF LITERATURE AND DISTURBING THE PEACE IN CASABLANCA IN 1973. THE TRIAL ENDED AUGUST 12 WITH 5 ACQUITTED AND 1 CONVICTED. THE CONVICTED YOUTH'S SENTENCE HAD ALREADY BEEN SERVED IN DETENTION.

6. USFP SOURCES SAY SOME POLITICAL PRISONERS ARE STILL BEING HELD AT 2 SPECIAL CAMPS IN THE SOUTH, AND THAT THIS UNTRIED GROUP OF ABOUT 181 HAS NOT YET BEEN SCHEDULED FOR TRIAL.

7. THE CASABLANCA TRIAL PROCESSES WERE ATTENDED BY LAURENT HINCKER OF STRASBOURG AS A REPRESENTATIVE OF BOTH AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND THE FRENCH LEAGUE FOR THE RIGHT OF MAN, AS WELL AS FRANCOIS JEMALDI, ALSO OF STRASFOURG, ARGUING FOR THE FEDERAL OFFICE OF UNEM IN FRANCE. THE LATTER ASSISTED THE MOROCCAN ATTORNEYS. HINCKER WAS QUOTED IN LE MONDE (AUGUST 4) AS EXPRESSING APPROVAL OF THE PROCEDURAL FAIRNESS OF THE TRIALS.

8. POSSIBLE AMNESTY: USFP AND ISTIQLAL SOURCES HAVE EXPRESSED THE HOPE FOR A GENERAL AMNESTY, AND THERE WAS WIDE SPECULATION THAT THE KING WOULD ANNOUNCE IT IN HIS ANNUAL AUGUST 20 ADDRESS, WHICH HE DID NOT DO. USFP ALSO HOPES THAT SUCH AN AMNESTY WOULD PERMIT EXILED MOROCCANS TO RETURN HOME. ONE USFP SOURCE CLAIMED THAT THE KING HAD AGREED TO PERMIT ABDERRAHMAN EL YOUSSEFI TO RETURN TO MOROCCO UNDER AN AMNESTY AND THAT THE KING HAD, AT LEAST AT ONE POINT, BEEN PREVAILED UPON TO PERMIT EVEN MOHAMED EL BASRI TO RETURN.

9. MEANING OF THE TRIALS. THE TRIALS APPEAR TO BE A CLEAR EFFORT BY THE GOVERNMENT TO CLEAR THE BOARDS FOR FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS BY ACCEDING TO ONE OF THE OPPOSITION'S MOST INSISTENT DEMANDS: THE FAIR TRIAL OR IMMEDIATE FREEDOM OF POLITICAL PRISONERS. THE USFP, FROM WHOSE RANKS MOST OF THOSE JAILED CAME, HAS UNDERSTANDABLY BEEN CONFIDENTIAL

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THE MOST VOCAL ON THE ISSUE ALTHOUGH ISTIQLAL AND PPS HAVE BEEN CONSISTENT SUPPORTERS OF THE POSITION AND HAVE ALSO CARRIED THE DEMAND AS ONE OF THEIR ELECTION PARTICIPATION PRECONDITIONS. A PPS EDITORIAL CALLED THE RESULTS "A GREAT DEMOCRATIC VICTORY". ISTIQLAL OFFICIALS ARE CLEARLY LESS ENTHUSIASTIC, AND ONE SENIOR OFFICIAL GROUSED THAT MANY MARXISTS HAD PROFITED. FOR ISTIQLAL, AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL PRISONER IS THE SON OF FORMER PRIME MINISTER BALAFREJ, WHO WAS SENTENCED IN 1973 TO 15 YEARS FOR CRIMES SIMILAR TO THOSE RECENTLY CHARGED AND ACQUITTED.

10. COMMENT: THE TRIALS ARE A STRONG AFFIRMATION OF THE KING'S GROWING CONFIDENCE IN HIS INTERNAL POSITION. THIS CONFIDENCE IS ALSO MANIFESTED IN OTHER WAYS, THE MOST RECENT OF WHICH ARE A SERIES OF FORWARD MOVEMENTS ON THE ELECTIONS FRONT. A READING OF OLD FILES FROM THE 72-74 PERIOD -- WHICH WAS DONE IN

PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT -- PROVIDES A GRIM CONTRAST IN ATMOSPHERIC
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TO THE RELATIVELY STABLE MOROCCO OF TODAY. THE OUTCOME OF THE
TRIALS APPEARS TO BE OPTIMAL FOR THE GROUPS INVOLVED, AND IN FACT
GOES FURTHER THAN MOST OF OUR CONTACTS EXPECTED. THE USFP AND THE
OTHER PARTIES GET AN END TO MOST PREVENTIVE DETENTION AND, WITH
THE RELATIVE LIGHTNESS OF SENTENCES, IMMEDIATE OR NEAR-FUTURE RELEASE
OF THEIR MILITANTS. AN AMNESTY, PARTIAL OR OTHERWISE, WOULD BE
ANOTHER SIGNIFICANT STEP TOWARD COMPROMISE BETWEEN THE GOM AND THE
LEFT OVER THEIR PAINFUL PAST.

11. WHILE WE CANNOT PREDICT THE KING'S MOVES ON SUCH ALIENATED
EXILES AS EL BASRI AND EL YOUSSEFI, HE MIGHT MAKE A GESTURE EVEN
TO THEM IN THE CURRENT CLIMATE OF TOGETHERNESS WHICH THE SAHARA
AFFAIR HAS AT LEAST TEMPORARILY WROUGHT. NO NOTABLE GROUP OF
MOROCCAN EXILES, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF SOME STUDENT GROUPS, HAS
EVER PUBLICLY CRITICIZED THE GOM ON THE SAHARA.

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